HOW TO RECRUIT, TRAIN & RETAIN VOLUNTEERS

Have you ever struggled to find volunteers for your ministry? Without volunteers, there's so much our ministries wouldn't be able to do well, like...

- Games.
- Small groups.
- Building relationships.
- Setting up and tearing down (over and over and over again).
- This could be an endless list!

But when we asked pastors what their number one struggle was in ministry, they overwhelmingly told us they struggled with *finding* volunteers. And it wasn't just finding volunteers they were struggling with. It was *training* them and *keeping them* involved in ministry, too.

So, if you need help recruiting, training, or retaining volunteers, here are a few things that might help.

1. EVALUATE YOUR CULTURE

If you want to get better at recruiting, retaining, and training volunteers, first, you'll want to **evaluate your volunteer culture.** Whether you realize it or not, you already have a volunteer culture in your ministry. But if you're struggling, it might be time to reevaluate that culture—and maybe even reinvent it.

Evaluating your culture means you'll need to take a step back and **look at what's working** inside your ministry because when you know what you're good at, you can do those things more often! But you'll also have to **be honest with yourself about what's not working.** It's essential to figure out where the problems are coming from—especially if they're coming from you.

And, really, sometimes they are. As a person leading a ministry, you're probably stretching yourself thin between handling ministry tasks, connecting with kids, teenagers, and their families, taking care of your own life, and doing the other random tasks that spring up each week—and that's just the stuff related to *your job.* But hey, don't be too discouraged. If you're looking at your volunteers and wondering, "Am I the problem?" you're not alone. So many of us have felt those same feelings, and building a new culture for your volunteers starts with acknowledging what's happening and working hard to shift things.

Once you've evaluated your culture, next on your to-do list should be to...

2. CREATE YOUR CULTURE

You want to build **a culture where volunteers love to serve.** That's the goal. That's the magnetic force that draws people in and keeps them around. When your culture is working, your volunteers will love their team. They'll love the vision. They'll love the kids and teenagers they're leading. And most importantly, they'll love how they feel God has been using them in ministry.

But here's the thing. **You can't build a great volunteer culture with a quick fix.** You won't build it with a single awesome recruitment campaign or by making people feel guilty for not serving. You'll only build it by intentionally and strategically working to create the culture you want to have.

To help you get there, we recommend you...

- **ASK BIG.** People want to know they matter. Your volunteers *need to know* that what they're doing matters to your ministry and the kids and teenagers they're leading. So, offer them big jobs. Ask them to do things that are really important to the ministry. Go beyond having them unmute your soundboard or load your worship songs into your presentation software. Invite them to take on whole pieces of your ministry if they can. You already know you're stretched thin, so maybe ask for a few volunteers

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to help you revamp your welcome area. Ask some volunteers to create and lead some games each week. Invite some volunteers to speak at your next Parent Workshop or to help you with your annual planning. When we ask our volunteers to do big things, it communicates how much they matter to us. It shows our trust in them and gives them an opportunity to make a difference. They want to do things that matter, so let them.

- **EMPOWER.** Even though you might be the leader of your ministry, it's not your job to do it all. Once you ask big and start giving away real influence and authority to your volunteers, you'll need to empower them with the tools and resources they need to help them along the way. The goal is to try and give your ministry away to your volunteers because you don't want it all resting on your shoulders. You want a ministry that is scalable and sustainable. You want a ministry that can keep going long after you're gone. So, empower your volunteers to take strategic risks and to try new things. Share your knowledge and tips. Help them find the resources and creative outlets they need to thrive. Empower your volunteers and release them to take part in meaningful ministry.
- **GET A STRATEGY.** Like everything we do, strategy sits at the center. You have to think ahead about what you want to build, how you want to get there, and what you want to do to keep it moving. If you've never considered developing a volunteer strategy, that's okay! We have one ready for your children's ministry or youth ministry. Part of your strategy might require you to create some new resources like a **Volunteer Handbook** and other tools to help your volunteers do their jobs. A Handbook helps keep your team attached to the vision of your ministry, their roles, and what's expected of them. This article teaches you what to put inside your volunteer handbook. You'll also want to think about how you hold Volunteer Meetings and one-on-one conversations. When you're building up a new culture, we encourage you to **meet individually with everyone** so you can ask for feedback, give volunteers space to opt out if they want, and help you see ways you can specifically empower them to be even more successful.

3. KEEP THE MOMENTUM

The point of a strategy is to create ways to **reach your volunteers all year long** instead of only during the one in-person meeting you may have, so be sure to think through these seven areas for your strategy.

- **EVENTS:** This is anything that gets your volunteers together for training, team building, or fun!
- **VOLUNTEER MEETINGS:** These meetings give you space to train your team on a specific topic or event.
- **VOLUNTEER DISCUSSION GROUPS:** You can let your volunteers train each other and invite them to lead each other in conversations around a specific topic.
- **ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS:** You'll want to make time in your schedule to sit down and connect with your volunteers. Here, you can ask about how they're doing, how they'd like to grow, and the ways you can help.
- **VOLUNTEER TOOLS:** These tools help volunteers do their jobs well. Your handbook, volunteer business cards, t-shirts, surveys, goals, and tip videos would include all this.
- **VOLUNTEER CELEBRATIONS:** Your team of volunteers deserves to be celebrated. Make time to celebrate them as often as you can.
- **VOLUNTEER COMMUNICATION:** You'll need to communicate the details of your weekly environment to your volunteers. Whether it's through email, social media, or text, you will need a plan for what to say and how you'll say it.

That may seem like a lot, but building a culture where volunteers love serving takes a lot of effort. But your team, ministry, and the kids and teenagers under your care deserve it. When you put in the effort to help your volunteers do things that matter, you'll start to see how everyone in your ministry can grow.

And, if you're using Grow Curriculum, we're here to help. We give you everything you need to start building a culture where volunteers love to serve. Every volume of Grow Curriculum comes with our complete volunteer strategy and the resources we've

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talked about to help you keep your vision in front of your volunteers and help them make a difference in your ministry, including ...

- Ideas for volunteer events
- Training outlines
- Discussion group guides
- Editable Volunteer Handbook files
- A communication plan
- Conversation guides
- And more!

We would love to help you build a great volunteer culture and train and maintain your incredible team of volunteers!



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